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January 26, 1973

WEST AFRICA: ARAB INFLUENCE GROWS

In the past five years Black Africa has become the scene of intensified diplomatic competition between Arab states and Israel. In those West African states with a Moslem majority, the Arab countries have played the two trump cards of pan-Islamic sentiment and offers of financial assistance to make substantial inroads into the Israeli diplomatic positions. We examine the situation in the states of West Africa that are largely Moslem, and its implications for the US.

ABSTRACT

Seeking support for their Middle East position, the Arab states of North Africa and the Near East have diligently wooed African countries south of the Sahara, especially since the military reverses inflicted by Israel during the June 1967 war. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) at its summit meeting in June 1972 went beyond its 1971 criticism of Israel in unanimously calling for a virtual UN arms embargo of Israel. An Afro-Arab consensus on the Middle East is becoming increasingly apparent at conferences of non-aligned states and in international organizations. Many West African states previously considered pro-Israel

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are now wavering. The latest signs of a clear shift to the Arab side include Chad's break with Israel last November, those of Niger and Congo in December, and that of Mali in early January.

Israel moved diplomatically into Black Africa immediately after the former colonies became independent. A small-scale, but energetic and effective assistance program won friends in Africa and votes in the UN. Many of the heavily-Moslem Black African states enjoyed good relations with Israel.

Israel's military victory and continued occupation of Arab territory changed the African perception of the Middle East situation. The North African states emphasized their geographic ties with the Blacks, and in West Africa played heavily, where appropriate, on the common religion of Islam. The willingness of some Arab states to provide financial assistance from increasing oil revenues has sped the erosion of the Israeli position. The Arab successes are probably more the result of isolated initiatives than of a coordinated diplomatic effort.

This development has added another issue on which the US and African states are often in disagreement. The

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trade-off of Arab support for the Black position on minority regimes in southern Africa for African backing on the Middle East has reinforced the voting power of both camps. On both issues, the US is believed to have decisive influence, and both Arab and African countries seek ways to apply pressure on US policy.



Penetration of Islam in Africa

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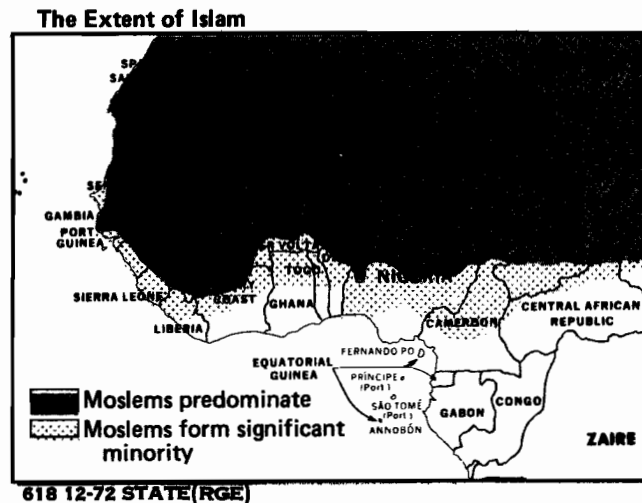
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I. NATURE OF THE COMPETITION

The Arab states, especially those of North Africa, have been paying increasing attention to the Black African countries south of the Sahara. The primary aim is to win support for the Arabs' Middle East position, but in some cases pan-Islamic sentiment is also strong.

Islam is the religion not only of the peoples of North Africa and Somalia, most Sudanese, and a large minority of Ethiopians, but also of most of the inhabitants along the East African coast as far south as the Zambezi (see maps). In West Africa Moslems predominate in Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, and Niger; and they are a large minority in Nigeria. Elsewhere in the region, as far south as Zaire, they are increasing in number and political importance.



The extent of Islam in West Africa

The Arab states have made significant gains, particularly in recent months. Uganda broke diplomatic relations with Israel in March; Chad followed in November. Israel announced on December 25 the closing of its embassies in Niger and the Congo "for budgetary and administrative reasons," leaving only non-resident accreditation in these two countries. The Congo reacted by severing relations completely, denouncing Israeli

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policies as "imperialist and expansionist." Niger, apparently regretting the break, also severed relations completely. The ruling Niger Progressive Party called Israeli representation in Niamey "inappropriate." The number of African countries supporting the Arab position in international gatherings, as noted below, has increased in the last two years. The termination of the north-south armed conflict between Arabs and Blacks in Sudan and the easing of a similar confrontation in Chad may also soften the deep-seated suspicions of Blacks, who have never forgotten the Arab role in the slave trade. The Israelis are disturbed at current trends and apparently are reassessing their position. In partial response to their slippage of influence in sub-Saharan Africa, they plan to upgrade their representation in Rwanda to the ambassadorial level, and will probably step up activities in Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland.

More Pro-Arab Resolutions

Increasing African support for the Arab position on the Middle East in international gatherings is evident in the OAU, UN, and periodic non-aligned conferences. As would be expected, the African states that are members of the Arab League regularly agree to resolutions condemning Israel. The non-Arab states that attended the Islamic summit conference at Rabat in 1969 and subsequent Islamic meetings at the foreign minister level have tended increasingly in the same direction.

The summit meeting of the Organization of African Unity in June 1972 went further in support of the Arab position than had previous meetings. Ever since its 1968 summit, the OAU has called for the withdrawal of foreign troops from "all occupied Arab territories" to the line of June 5, 1967. The 1969 summit for the first time condemned Israel and expressed solidarity with Egypt. The 1972 heads-of-state assembly unanimously denounced Israeli obstructionism in preventing resumption of the UN Jarring Mission, urged all OAU members to give Egypt every assistance, and called upon UN members to refrain from giving Israel any arms, military equipment, or moral support.

At the UN General Assembly in 1971 more African states than theretofore supported a stronger pro-Arab resolution;¹ and the Arab draft at the 1972 General Assembly, subsequently modified before adoption, was based on the text of the 1972 OAU resolution.

1. Twenty-one African states voted with the Arab states; none with Israel. The remainder abstained.

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The Afro-Arab majority at the September 1972 Georgetown (Guyana) Non-Aligned Conference successfully pushed through a declaration calling for immediate and unconditional Israeli withdrawal from all occupied lands. The 1973 conference, to be held in Algiers, may go further.

Israel First Off the Mark

Israel moved quickly when most African states received independence in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Flattering Israeli telegrams of recognition and congratulations often arrived during the first 24 hours of euphoria after independence. Upper Volta, for example, obtained independence on August 5, 1960; the same day, Israeli President Ben-Zvi cabled recognition, offered to establish diplomatic relations, and guaranteed 15 scholarships for Voltan students. Israel established embassies in all West African countries except Mauritania. Small-scale but highly appreciated assistance amounting to half of all Israel's foreign aid followed to 32 African states. A "progressive" African leader like Kwame Nkrumah found ties with Israel in keeping with his socialist, anti-colonial outlook.



*Presidents Mobutu, Senghor, Gowon,
and Ahidjo with Prime Minister Meir*

The Israeli image--a small state and energetic people making striking progress in a hostile environment--appealed to the newly independent African states. African leaders invited to Israel saw a

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working "socialist" economy and the desert literally made to bloom through hard work. Many African leaders who had been active in French politics prior to independence--such as Niger's Diori Hamani and Senegal's Leopold Senghor--retained the sympathetic attitude toward Israel that was characteristic of the French political parties to which they had belonged. Clearly, technical assistance from the Israelis was worth an occasional vote on seemingly peripheral UN resolutions.

Arabs Enter Game

Concerned at these Israeli inroads and looking for support from other countries on the Middle East question, Arab states began to place more emphasis on relations with sub-Saharan Africa. Egypt, in the early 60's, presented Nasserism as an ideology for nation-building, and began to take a more active and vocal role in third world affairs. Non-aligned and similar type conferences became a vehicle for Arab influence. To offset visits by African leaders to Israel, Arab states arranged visits to their own capitals and offered aid. Algiers and Cairo awarded scholarships to young Africans. The major African liberation movements opened offices in Cairo, and Algeria provided some of them with training, money, and arms. In West Africa the Egyptian State Construction Company undertook multi-story buildings in Niger, Mali, and Ivory Coast. Tunisia provided technical assistance for the establishment and operation of Niger's development bank. Despite the Arab efforts, the Israeli diplomatic position remained roughly stable until the June 1967 war.



*Presidents Mobutu Sese Seko
and Anwar Sadat*

Israeli Diplomatic Setbacks After 1967

The Israeli victory in the Six-Day War had both immediate and longer term implications for the African view of the Middle East situation. Many Africans initially identified with the image of an Israeli David locked in battle with an Arab Goliath. They shared vicarious pleasure at seeing the Arabs humiliated by the numerical underdog. But this identification with Israel's victory faded as time passed. Israel's policy of aggressive, retaliatory strikes and refusal to withdraw from the occupied territories damaged its image. Although nearly all the Moslem-majority states of Black Africa

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clearly accepted Israel's right to exist, they became increasingly reluctant to approve the acquisition of territory (especially "African" territory) by force.

The Arab states intensified their diplomatic activity in Africa, particularly in those countries where Islam is strong. They began giving the Africans more support on the question of white minority regimes in southern Africa. Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco stressed, at least to Black Africans, their common continental affinity. They portrayed Israel's continued presence in the Sinai as foreign military occupation of "African" soil.

The Qadhafi regime, which came to power in Libya in September 1969, has large sums of money and is willing to spend it in the furtherance of its foreign policy objectives. It is proving a strong attraction to Moslem Africans. In West Africa, Niger and Mauritania have been particular recipients of Libyan aid, and other African leaders must view this with at least a hint of envy. After the break in relations with Israel, Chad's President Francois Tombalbaye visited Tripoli and was apparently promised credits totalling \$92 million. This would be the largest amount Libya has committed to any Black African country. Although Western-oriented leaders, such as Niger's President Diori Hamani, may have misgivings about Libya's adventuresome foreign policy, their need for external assistance is critical.

Israel attempted to counter Arab efforts but was unwilling to engage in a potentially expensive competition in aid with wealthy oil-producing states. Foreign Minister Abba Eban was dispatched on a seven-country fence-mending trip to Africa in June 1971. The purpose of the trip was clearly to drum up backing in view of the OAU summit meeting scheduled for Addis Ababa later that month. Israel announced a gift to the African liberation movements at the same time. Although the amount offered, \$2,880, was small, South Africa quickly threatened to cut off remittances from Jews in that country to Israel. Near the close of the summit, however, Israel made a preemptive strike in Egypt. Even Israel's friends felt obliged to condemn the attack on a fellow OAU member, at least in public.

Saudi Arabia's King Feisal visited Uganda, Chad, Senegal, Mauritania, and Niger November 14-29, 1972. Stressing Islamic solidarity, he offered a moderate counterweight to the more radical Arab regimes, but he also sought Black African support for anti-Israeli statements. Communiqués issued during the visit condemned both Zionism and apartheid, expressed support for the Palestinian cause, and hinted at possible Saudi aid to African economic development. It was shortly after the visit that Chad severed long-standing diplomatic relations with Israel.

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II. THE BOX SCORE IN WEST AFRICA

The improvement in the Arab position and the concomitant weakening of Israel's has been uneven, but an overall trend is clearly identifiable in the country-by-country review below:

Mauritania has always considered itself sufficiently Arab to preclude recognition of Israel.

Mali had a resident Israeli ambassador until January 5, 1973, although its population is overwhelmingly Moslem. Former Malian President Modibo Keita visited Israel prior to Malian independence, and Mali has received Israeli technical assistance. Mali has consistently voted with the Arabs on Middle East questions at the United Nations. On January 5, 1973, the Malian Foreign Ministry summoned the Israeli ambassador, informed him that relations were broken with immediate effect, and issued a communique decrying Israeli air raids on Arab territory, occupation of Arab lands, and refusal to abide by UN and OAU resolutions on the Middle East.



A Nigerien drummer greets Algerian President Boumedienne during his May 28, 1972 visit to Niamey.

Niger had a resident Israeli ambassador and received modest amounts of technical assistance until Israel announced recently the downgrading of relations to non-resident ambassadorial status. Niger had consistently abstained on UN votes critical of Israel until 1971. In that year, Libya began an aid program that made Niger an "emphasis" country. Exact figures are not available, but assistance has been on the order of \$4-5 million to date, and has ranged from cultural and religious programs to buying vehicles for the government.

Events in Niger differed from those in Chad, Mali, and Congo. President Diori obviously felt himself under considerable pressure to break with Israel, especially in the wake of the Chadian rupture. At this juncture, Israel unilaterally announced the downgrading of its embassy to non-resident status, for "budgetary and administrative reasons." Apparently as a face-

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saving gesture, the Niger Progressive Party (which often speaks for Diori when he wants his views publicized without the official presidential stamp) called Israeli representation in Niger "inappropriate," and called for a just and lasting peace which would take account of the rights of the Palestinian people and Niger's Egyptian brethren. Niger apparently did not receive any additional Arab "bonus" for breaking with Israel, and statements made at the time were comparatively mild. Israel remains mildly optimistic that relations may some day be reestablished.

Gambia has a resident Israeli ambassador, and benefits from a small assistance program. Israeli-Gambian relations have been good, with Gambia usually considered solidly in the "pro-Israel" column. However, pressure from other African states has increased to the extent that Gambia feels constrained at least to condemn Israel's occupation of territory acquired by force. It voted against Israel in the 26th (1971) General Assembly.

Guinea broke relations with Israel following the 1967 war.

Senegal is in a delicate position. President Senghor is a Catholic in a heavily Moslem country. Although he has repeatedly noted his identification with the Judeo-Christian intellectual tradition and has leaned toward Israel in the past, Senghor has recently indicated a greater receptivity to Arab advances. His participation in 1971 in the OAU "committee of wise men" to mediate the Middle East dispute left him with the distinct impression that Israeli intransigence had prevented progress and that Israel had reneged on promises it had made to him. Senegal's officially stated position on the Middle East used to be balanced. Continued Israeli occupation of Arab territory and pressure from domestic Moslem leaders have changed Senghor's mind. Although both Israel and the Arab states are represented in Dakar, Senghor now says, "We are on the side of the Arab people." Israeli setbacks in Niger, Mali, Chad, and the Congo will increase pressure on Senghor to oust the Israelis from Senegal.



Presidents Leopold Senghor and Houari Boumedienne

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Nigeria received Arab support and assistance during its civil war (1967-1970). Egyptian pilots flew Soviet-built aircraft in combat for the Federal Military Government. Israel, in contrast, provided arms to the secessionists. The Biafran leader, Lt. Col. C. O. Ojukwu, clearly saw an analogy between Biafra's struggle and Israel's fight against numerically superior Arab nations. Nigeria is cooperating with the Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to defend their common interests as oil producers. Nonetheless, Arab heavyhandedness can still shock Nigerian sensibilities. In December 1970 the Arabs successfully insisted that the Israeli ambassador be expelled from the diplomatic gallery at an open session of the OAU being held in Lagos. Even normally pro-Arab newspapers criticized this breach of courtesy.

Chad maintained relations with Israel from shortly after independence until November 28, 1972. Libyan differences with Chad led to a reconciliation meeting in Niamey, Niger, in April 1972. The meeting's final communique, which restored diplomatic relations between the two, also associated Chad with "the just, armed fight of the Palestinian people for the liberation of their territory occupied by Israel." Saudi Arabian King Feisal's visit to Chad November 17-20 undoubtedly added impetus to the movement that culminated in the severance of relations. Chad's President, Francois Tombalbaye, visited Tripoli in late December, returning with the promise of a \$92 million loan.

Upper Volta, one of the poorest countries, bases much of its foreign policy on the need for assistance. Israeli aid to date includes a number of scholarships for study in Israel, a pediatrician, and an adviser to the national lottery. Although President Sangoule Lamizana upholds Israel's right to exist, he stated in March 1972, "There will be no peace as long as people occupy territory which does not belong to them." Lamizana sent his Foreign Minister to Jerusalem to balance his own visits to Libya and Egypt in February and March. Arab aid to Upper Volta has included scholarships for agricultural studies in Egypt, and subsidies from Egypt, Algeria, and Libya to the Voltan Moslem community. For the moment, Upper Volta remains in the "neutral" column, but if Libyan, or possibly Kuwaiti or Saudi, money becomes available, the temptation to move further from Israel will grow.

Ivory Coast remains Israel's strongest ally in West Africa. Assistance from Israel, amounting to several hundred thousand dollars a year, has run the gamut from para-military to help in agriculture and mechanized farming. Private Israeli investment, particularly in the hotel business, amounts to some \$14 million. Ivorian Middle East policy is unlikely to shift during President Houphouet-Boigny's lifetime. Nonetheless, Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Egypt maintain embassies in Abidjan. The El Nasr Company, Egypt's state trading concern, has offices in Ivory Coast.

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III. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE US

The increasing alignment of African countries on the Arab side of the Middle East dispute interjects another issue on which Africans and the US do not agree. The more activist Arab governments are happy to use the voting power of numerous sub-Saharan states to reinforce their position. In return, these countries welcome Arab support on such issues as southern African liberation. Each group believes the US has the power to force the changes they themselves desire, be it in the Middle East or in southern Africa. Increasing Arab influence in Black Africa speeds the development of conscious efforts to find ways to bring pressure on the US in areas of prime concern to Arabs and Africans.

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